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starting out: the sicilian

JOHN EMMS



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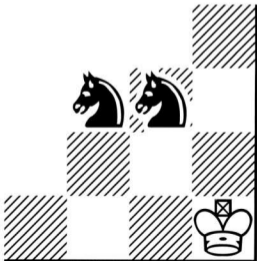
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Chapter One

The Dragon Variation

- The Yugoslav Attack
- The Classical Variation
- The Levenfish Attack
- White Plays g2-g3



1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 (Diagram 1)



Diagram 1

The starting position for the Sicilian Dragon

The Dragon Variation is the Sicilian in its most natural and logical form. Black develops his pieces on their most active squares. In particular, the 'Dragon bishop' is fianchettoed on the long diagonal, down which it exerts its significant presence.

It's possible that the Dragon derived its name from the shape made by Black's pawn island from the d- to h-files. Its name is certainly consistent with the type of chess it produces: aggressive, cut-throat and fearsome. This line of the Sicilian is not for the faint-hearted!

The Dragon has been around for over a century. It was first used in the 1880s by the renowned openings theoretician Louis Paulsen and it was also taken up by Harry Nelson Pillsbury, one of the world's leading players at the turn of the century. Nowadays it has supporters at every level of chess and in 1995 it received an ultimate seal of approval when Garry Kasparov utilised it with great success in his world championship match with Vishy Anand.

The Yugoslav Attack

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3

This bishop move, further developing the queenside, signifies that White intends to play the Yugoslav Attack. This line (which is sometimes also referred to as the 'Rauzer Attack') occurred a few times in the 1930s in the Soviet Union and was later refined by leading Yugoslav players.

I can safely say that the Yugoslav Attack is the ultimate test of the Dragon. White quickly develops his queenside and castles long before turning his attentions to an all-out assault on the black king. To the untrained eye, this attack can look both awesome and unnerving.

6...Bg7

Attacking the bishop with $6...Ng4??$ is a bad mistake as the reply $7 Bb5+$ wins material after either $7...Nc6$ $8 Nxc6$ $bxc6$ $9 Bxc6+$ $Bd7$ $10 Bxa8$ or $7...Bd7$ $8 Qxg4$ (the bishop on d7 is pinned).

7 f3

Preventing the annoying possibility of $...Ng4$ and thus preparing $Qd2$ and $0-0-0$.

7...0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4

Another major possibility for White is the immediate $9 0-0-0$, not expending time with the manoeuvre $Bc4-b3$. This can give White extra time to conduct his attack. However, this also gives Black the extra option of an immediate strike in the centre with $9...d5??$ (see Game 3).

9...Bd7 10 0-0-0 (Diagram 2)



Diagram 2

A normal starting position in the Yugoslav Attack

Strategies

White plans the following:

- 1) Prise open the h-file with $h2-h4-h5$, perhaps supported by $g2-g4$.
- 2) Exchange off Black's main defenders on the kingside. The Dragon bishop on $g7$ can be exchanged with $Be3-h6$. The defensive knight on $f6$ can be exchange or eliminated in a number of ways, including $Nd5$ and $g4-g5$.

Put another way, in the words of Bobby Fischer, 'pry open the h-file, sac, sac ... mate!'

Black plans to gain counterplay on the queenside with moves such as $...Ra8-c8$, $...Ne5-c4$, $...b7-b5$ and $...Qd8-a5$. Sometimes Black sacrifices a rook for knight with $...Rc8xc3$, disrupting the pawn structure around the white king. Defensively, Black can consider halting the advance of White's h-pawn with $...h7-h5$. Although this allows White to continue an attack with $g2-g4$, this is sometimes more difficult to

arrange. If given time, Black may move the f8-rook, a point of which is to answer Bh6 with ...Bh8. This allows Black to keep the 'Dragon bishop', which does such a good job along the long diagonal both in defence and attack.

Compared to the other variations in the Dragon, the Yugoslav Attack is by far the most tactical and dynamic. Mating combinations and sacrifices are the order of the day as both players go for an early kill. Positional play rarely enters the fray but is more likely if the queens are exchanged early. This can sometimes be achieved if an early ...Qd8-a5 is answered by Nc3-d5, offering an exchange on d2.

Theoretical?

The Yugoslav Attack is perhaps the most theoretically complex line of all openings. General principles are useful, but in this opening there is no substitute for learning the seemingly endless amount of critical variations. If you wish to play the Dragon then you need to be thoroughly prepared for all of White's options in the Yugoslav Attack. This means a lot of hard work, but the reward for the well-prepared can be many easily obtained points.

Statistics

Because of the excitement it brings, the Yugoslav Attack is fantastically popular at all levels of chess. The diagram position above has been reached literally thousands of times in international chess. According to *Mega Database 2002* (a database of over two million top class games), White scores around 55%, just one per cent above average. The most revealing statistic is that over 75% of all games in the Yugoslav are decisive (the normal figure is around 65%).

Illustrative Games

Game 1

Minic P.Lee

Krakow 1964

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3
0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Be4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8

Beginning counterplay on the half-open c-file.

10...Qa5 is another popular line, championed by the English grandmaster and Dragon expert Chris Ward. In this variation Black plans to shift his f8-rook to c8, thus allowing the option of meeting Bh6 with ...Bh8.

11 Bb3

Sensible play. The bishop moves out of the line of fire on the c-file.

11...Ne5

Unleashing the rook and preparing ...Ne5-c4.

12 h4

Here comes that h-pawn! Now Black has two major alternatives.

12...Nc4

Another major possibility for Black here is 12...h5 (see Game 2).

13 Bxc4

It is generally better for White to give up the light-squared bishop for this knight; the other bishop is needed to exchange off black's 'Dragon bishop'.

13...Rxc4 14 h5

The slower 14 g4, preparing h4-h5 without sacrifice, is also possible.

Exercise 1: What's wrong with the immediate 14 Bh6, offering a trade of dark-squared bishops?

14...Nxb5 15 g4

The point: White has sacrificed a pawn to open the h-file and gain time for the attack by hassling the knight.

15...Nf6 16 Bh6!? (Diagram 3)



Diagram 3
White offers a trade



Diagram 4
How does White continue?

This move leads to great complications.

16...Bxh6?

It's a sure sign of a razor sharp system when a natural-looking move simply loses out of hand.



WARNING: One slip by either side in the Yugoslav Attack is often decisive.

The move 16...Nxe4!, unleashing the 'Dragon bishop' in an attack on d4, is the theoretical recommendation. Of course, there are an incredible number of tries for both sides but decades of experience has

shown that the critical line is 17 Qe3! Rxc3 (shattering the pawns on the queenside) 18 bxc3 Nf6 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 with a very unclear position. White is the exchange for a pawn ahead and still has chances to attack down the h-file. White's own king, however, is looking very airy and Black can unleash a quick counter with ...Qa5 and ...Rc8. Notice that 20 Qh6+ Kh8! 21 g5 Nh5 defends for Black, for example: 22 Rxh5 gxh5 23 Rh1 Rg8 24 Rxh5 Rg7 and White's attack has reached a dead end.

17 Qxh6 Rxc3

A logical response. Black gives up his rook for a knight in order to prevent Nd5 and ruin the pawn structure around the white king. This is such a typical shot for Black in the Dragon. Here, unfortunately, it arrives too late.

18 g5!

White simply ignores the rook; the attack down the h-file will be devastating.

18...Nh5 (Diagram 4) 19 Rxh5!

Eliminating Black's final defender.

19...gxh5 20 Rh1

Despite being a rook ahead, Black has no defence to the mating attack along the h-file.

20...Qc8

Or 20...f6 21 g6! hxg6 22 Qxg6+ Kh8 23 Rxh5 mate.

21 Rxh5 Bf5 22 exf5 Rxc2+ 23 Nxc2 Qxf5 24 g6! Black resigns

A final tactic. 24...Qxg6 25 Rg5 wins the queen and leaves Black hopelessly behind on material.

Game 2

□ Koval ■ Berman

Correspondence 1985

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Be4 Bd7 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5

Via a slightly different move-order, we've reached the main position where Black plays ...h7-h5, preventing White from playing h4-h5.

13 Bg5

Moving the bishop to an active square and preparing kingside operations. Of course, White has many ways to conduct the attack: he can also continue with the ultra-aggressive 13 g4 or 13 Bh6, or play a preparatory defensive move such as 13 Kb1.

13...Rc5

As well as pressure down the c-file, the rook can also be used for defensive purposes on the fourth rank.

14 g4!?

White goes 'all in'.

14...hxg4 15 Bxf6?

A fundamental mistake. White eliminates a black defender but now there will be no way of getting rid of Black's powerful 'Dragon bishop'.



WARNING: Be very wary of exchanging the dark-squared bishop for a knight in the Dragon. Unless this leads to something concrete, this is rarely a good idea (this applies to both White and Black).

Further sacrificing with 15 h5, leading to massive complications, is the way forward.

15...Bxf6 16 h5 g5!

Refusing to open the h-file.

17 Nd5 Rxd5!

Another example of an effective exchange sacrifice. White's powerful knight is eliminated from the board.

18 exd5 gxf3 19 c3 g4

White's attack has reached a dead end on the kingside. Slowly but surely, Black takes over the operation.

20 Kb1 Qb6 21 Bc2 Nc4 22 Qc1 Rc8 23 Nf5? (Diagram 5)



Diagram 5

Black has a winning tactic



Diagram 6

White has a strong bishop on c5

Allowing a deadly combination.

23...Na3+ 24 Ka1 Rxc3! 25 Nxe7+ Kf8 White resigns

Black mates after 26 bxc3 Bxc3+, while White's position collapses after 26 Rh2 f2.

Game 3

□ Almasi ■ Watson

German Bundesliga 1995

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3

0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0

White hopes to gain time to use in the kingside attack by delaying (or leaving out) the development of the bishop to c4. If Black simply develops as normal this extra time can be very advantageous to White.

9...d5!?

This is what White's last move allows. Now there are some exchanges in the centre.

10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4

The positional approach, offering the trade of dark-squared bishops.

White can win a pawn here with 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qxd5, but after 13...Qc7 the open files on the queenside give Black plenty of attacking chances. Note that 14 Qxa8 Bf5! wins the queen. After 15 Qxf8+ Kxf8 Black still has a strong attack.

12...e5 13 Bc5 Be6!

Another typical offer of an exchange sacrifice in the Dragon.

14 Ne4!

After 14 Bxf8 Qxf8 most experts agree that Black's attacking chances and dark square control more than make up for the slight material deficit. Note that Black already threatens ...Bh6, pinning the white queen to the king. Indeed, Dragon expert and Grandmaster Eduard Gufeld has won at least once in this fashion!

NOTE: Exchange sacrifices are very common in the Yugoslav Attack.

14...Re8 15 g4 h6 16 h4 a5 17 g5 h5 18 a4 Qc7 19 Bc4 Red8 20 Qf2 Qb7 21 b3 (Diagram 6)

Play is slower here than in the other games in the Yugoslav, as both the kingside and the queenside are partially blocked.

21...Nf4 22 Bxe6 Nxe6 23 Rxd8+! Rxd8 24 Bb6 Ra8 25 Rd1 Nd4 26 Bc5 Qd7 27 Nf6+ Bxf6 28 gxf6 Qf5?

A mistake. Correct is 28...Rd8!, after which 29 Rd3?? Nxb3+! 30 Rxb3 Qd1+ 31 Kb2 Rd2 (Almasi) gives Black a winning attack.

29 Bxd4 exd4 30 Qxd4 Qxf3 31 Qe5!

Now White is breaking through on the kingside.

31...Qf2 32 Rd7! Rf8 33 Kb2 c5 34 Rxf7! Black resigns

A nice combination to finish the game. White mates after both 34...Kxf7 35 Qe7+ Kg8 36 Qg7 and 34...Rxf7 35 Qe8+ Rf8 36 Qxg6+ Kh8 37 Qg7.

The Classical Variation

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2

While it's true that the Yugoslav Attack is the crucial test of the Dragon, playing in such a flamboyant way does not suit everyone's

tastes. For the more peacefully inclined, the Classical Variation is an ideal choice. White simply develops in a 'classical' manner and castles kingside.

6...Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 (Diagram 7)



Diagram 7

A starting position for the Classical



Diagram 8

A typical Classical position

Adding early pressure onto d4. Now White must be wary of tactics.

8 Be3

This is logical, supporting the knight on d4, but let's also look at a couple of alternatives:

a) 8 f4? (White neglects to deal with the threat) 8...Nxe4! (unleashing the power of the bishop) 9 Nxc6 (9 Nxe4 Nxd4 also wins a pawn) 9...Qb6+ 10 Kh1 Nxc3 11 bxc3 bxc6 and Black has won a vital pawn.

NOTE: In the Dragon Black has many tactics available to exploit the pressure along the long a1-h8 diagonal.

b) 8 Nb3 chooses at once to move the knight away from the crossfire in the centre. After 8...0-0 White often continues with 9 Bg5, a line which was made popular by Karpov in the late 1970s (see Game 4).

8...0-0 9 Nb3

Again removing the knight from the centre, thus eliminating annoying tactics for Black. A semi-waiting move such as 9 Kh1 is met directly by the strategically desirable advance 9...d5!. Following 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Bf3 Qa5 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Bxc6 Rb8 Black is extremely active.

Beginning a kingside offensive with 9 f4!? looks logical, but Black can exploit the weaknesses in White's position with the dangerous 9...Qb6. The theory is rather complex but Black is more than holding his own.

NOTE: White should normally try to prevent the ...d6-d5 advance.

9...Be6 (Diagram 8)

A good square for the bishop, pointing menacingly at the queenside.

Strategies

The stage is set for an interesting positional battle. White tries to keep a firm grip on the central squares (especially d5) and can play aggressively with f2-f4-f5 and even g2-g4-g5. These lunges, however, are double-edged. If White is not careful then he can leave himself overextended and vulnerable to counter-attack.

Black's best chance of counterplay lies in the half-open c-file and the possibility of pushing the a- and b-pawns. He may seek to place a piece on the desirable c4-square and this can be achieved, for example, with ...Rc8, ...Ne5 (a5) and ...Nc4 (or Bc4). At any time Black will be looking to see if he can carry out a favourable ...d6-d5 advance.

The Classical Variation gives rise to very much more strategic play than the Yugoslav Attack. White still concentrates mainly on the kingside (and Black on the other wing), but the respective attacks are more restrained and are more of a space-gaining exercise rather than an all-out mating attack. The Classical appeals to more positionally minded white players.

Theoretical?

The Classical Variation is much less theoretical than the Yugoslav Attack and players are more likely to be able to get away with just playing on general principles.

Statistics

Everything else dwarfs in comparison to the popularity of the Yugoslav Attack, but it's safe to say that the Classical Variation comes a safe second. According to *Mega Database 2002*, Diagram 7 has been reached in over 1,200 games. Overall White scores around 52%, while 66% of the games are decisive.

Illustrative Games

Game 4

□ Apicella ■ Svidler

Yerevan Olympiad 1996

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3 0-0 9 Bg5 a6

Black begins queenside operations.

10 f4 b5 11 Bf3

Threatening e4-e5, but Black has a natural response.

11...Bb7 12 Kh1

This is a common move in many Sicilian positions. The king is safer on h1 and White does not have to consistently calculate lines involv-

ing a queen check on b6.

12...Nd7 13 Rb1

Defending the b-pawn so that the knight on c3 can move to d5.

13...Re8 14 Nd5

Now White has annoying pressure against the e7-pawn. Black deals with this in a surprising way.

14...f6!

This move was discovered by the Brain Games World Champion, Vladimir Kramnik. It seems strange to block the Dragon bishop like this, but it seems that there are other positional factors which favour Black.

15 Bh4 e6 16 Ne3 g5! 17 Bg3

After 17 fxe5 fxe5 18 Bg3 Nde5 the 'Dragon bishop' has come to life and Black has acquired the e5-square as an important outpost.



NOTE: An outpost is a square which cannot easily be attacked by enemy pawns. The e5-square is often a useful outpost for Black in the Sicilian.

17...gxf4 18 Bxf4 Nde5 19 Bh5 Rf8 (Diagram 9)

Black's 'Dragon bishop' is hemmed in by the pawn on f6, but Black is extremely solid and has a good defensive outpost on e5.

20 c3 Qe7 21 Qe2 Ng6 22 Bg3 Nce5 23 Nd2 Kh8 24 Rf2 Rad8 25 Rb1 Bh6



Diagram 9
Black is extremely solid



Diagram 10
White dictates matters

Now the dark-squared bishop is as active as its partner on b7.

26 Ng4?! Nxe4 27 Bxe4 d5!

Breaking up the centre and increasing the activity of his piece. Black is now firmly in control.

28 Bh5 dxe4 29 Nxe4 f5 30 Bxe4 hxe4 31 Nd6 Ba8!

31...Rxd6? loses material to 32 Qe5+!

32 Be5+ Kg8 33 Rd1 Rd7 34 Qd3 Rfd8

The knight on d6 superficially looks impressive, but in fact it's quite vulnerable as it has no safe square to go to.

35 Qg3 Qg5 36 Qxg5 Bxg5 37 Rd3 Be4 38 Rh3 Rxd6 39 Rh8+ Kf7 40 Rh7+ Ke8 41 Rh8+ Kd7 White resigns

Following 42 Rxd8+ Bxd8 43 Bxd6 Kxd6 44 Rd2+ Ke7 the two bishops heavily outclass the rook in this endgame.

Game 5

Thipsay Duncan

London 1994

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Be3 0-0 9 Nb3 Be6 10 f4 Rc8 11 Kh1

White can play more aggressively with 11 f5, but after 11...Bd7 he must be careful not to overextend. After 11 f5 Bd7 12 g4?! Ne5! 13 g5 Rxc3! 14 bxc3 Nxe4 Black's pieces dominate the board.

NOTE: The ...Rxc3 exchange sacrifice is particularly effective if Black can also grab White's important central pawn.

11...Na5

Planning to make use of the c4-square. Black can also keep his options open with 11...a6, with the idea of ...b7-b5-b4.

12 f5 Nc4

Perhaps 12...Bc4 is stronger.

13 Bd4 Bd7 14 Bxe4 Rxe4 15 Qd3 Rc8 16 a4

White's extra space promises a small advantage.

16...a6 17 a5 Bc6 18 Nd2 Qd7?!

18...Qc7 prevents White's next move.

19 Nd5! Bxd5 20 exd5 Ng4 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 c4 Ne5 23 Qe4 Kh8 24 b3 (Diagram 10)

The pawn structure has changed in White's favour. Black no longer has counterplay on the queenside and White is free to concentrate on kingside operations.

24...Rg8 25 h3 Rg7 26 f6! exf6 27 Rxf6 Rgg8 28 Qd4 Rge8 29 Ne4 Qe7 30 Ra1 Rcd8 31 Rxf7 Qh4 32 Nf6 Qh6 33 Nxe8 Rxe8 34 R7f6 Black Resigns

The Levenfish Attack

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4 (Diagram 11)

The Russian Grandmaster Grigory Levenfish developed this trappy line in the 1930s as an alternative to the tried and trusted Classical.



Diagram 11

The starting position for the Levenfish Attack

6...Nc6

6...Bg7 is the most natural move in the position, but this allows White to complicate matters with 7 e5 (see Game 6).

7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 e5 Nd7 9 exd6 exd6

This leads us to Game 7.

Strategies

White hopes to catch Black cold with an early advance in the centre. Aided by the f-pawn, White quickly pushes his e-pawn to e5, dislodging Black's f6-knight and impeding Black's comfortable development. Black's strategy must be to get through the opening few moves without any disasters occurring, which is sometimes easier said than done! However, if Black can negotiate these difficult early moves then he has a good chance of reaching a very promising position in the early middlegame.

The Levenfish often begins with a flurry of tactics. However, assuming Black gets through these without any harm, then the positions can become either tactical or strategic in nature.

Theoretical?

Black players are advised to methodically learn an acceptable defence to the Levenfish Attack. Refraining from this can lead to an early disaster and on this occasion one would rather not learn from an unpleasant experience!

Statistics

The Levenfish is not popular at the highest levels and there have been very few grandmaster games in the past few years. At lower lev-

els, however, the Levenfish is both more popular and more successful; many inexperienced black players keep falling into one or other of the many pitfalls.

Illustrative Games

Game 6

□ Pilnik ■ Kashdan

New York 1948

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4 Bg7 7 e5!

After this move Black must tread very carefully.

7...dxe5

Another option for Black is 7...Nh5. Now the move 8 g4? seems to trap the black knight. However, Black has the resource 8...Nxf4! 9 Bxf4 dxe5, regaining the piece with advantage. Instead of 8 g4, White should play 8 Bb5+ Bd7 9 e6!.

8 fxe5 Ng4?

WARNING: The knight on g4 can be vulnerable to tactical shots in the opening.

8...Nfd7 9 e6 Ne5 is the best way for Black to continue. After 8...Ng4? White wins material by force.

9 Bb5+! (Diagram 12)



Diagram 12
Black is in trouble



Diagram 13
Black's knight is a beast!

9...Nc6

The only move. Both 9...Bd7 and 9...Nd7 lose a piece to 10 Qxg4, while 9...Kf8? suffers a worse fate after 10 Ne6+! and 11 Qxd8.

10 Nxc6 Qxd1+

Or 10...bxc6 11 Bxc6+, followed by Bxa8.



11 Nxd1 a6 12 Ba4 Bd7 13 h3 Nh6

By pinning the knight to the bishop, Black regains his piece, but a little trick ensures that White remains a valuable pawn up.

14 Nxe7! Bxa4 15 Nd5 Rd8 16 e4 Nf5 17 Bg5 Rd7 18 N1c3 Bc6 19 0-0-0 h5

19...Bxe5 loses material to 20 Rhe1, setting up a deadly pin.

20 Nc7+! Kf8

20...Rxc7 allows mate in one with 21 Rd8.

21 Rxd7 Bxd7 22 Rd1

Black is forced to give up a piece. 22...Be8 loses to 23 Rd8.

22...Bxe5 23 Rxd7 h4 24 Ne4 Nd4 25 Rd8+ Kg7 26 Ne8+ Kh7 27 N4f6+ Bxf6 28 Nxf6+ Black resigns

Game 7

□ Iljin ■ Cebalo

Baden 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4 Nc6!

To a certain extent, this move avoids the tricks.

7 Nxc6

Or 7 Bb5 Bd7 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 e5 Nd5 10 Nxd5 cxd5 11 exd6 e6! (Ward) and Black follows up with ...Bxd6.

White can play in a quiet manner with 7 Nf3!?, but this poses no real threat to the black position. Play is level after 7...Bg7 8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0 Bg4.

7...bxc6 8 e5

White insists on the central breakthrough.

8...Nd7 9 exd6 exd6 10 Qd4

By attacking the rook in the corner and preparing to castle queenside, White keeps up the pace. Objectively, 10 Be2 is safer but hardly troublesome for Black.

10...Nf6 11 Be3 Be7!

An unusual occurrence in the Dragon; the bishop is developed on e7 rather than g7! However, there is a good reason; after 11...Bg7 12 0-0-0 d5 13 Qc5! Black has problems castling.

12 0-0-0 0-0 13 h3

Preventing ...Ng4.

13...d5 14 Na4?!

Preparing Nc5, but Black gets in first!

14...Ne4! (Diagram 13)

This is a powerful outpost for the black knight.

15 Be2 Be6

Black now has a very automatic attack on the queenside, with moves such as ...Qa5, ...Rb8 and ...Bf6 springing to mind. White's next move, sacrificing a pawn to clear lines, smacks of desperation.

16 f5 Bxf5 17 Bh6 Bf6! 18 Qe3 Re8 19 Qf4 Qa5 20 b3 Nc3 21 Bd3 Nxa2+ 22 Kb1 Nc3+ 23 Kc1 Re4 24 Qd6 Be7 25 Qxc6 Rc8 26 Qa6 Rxa4 27 bxa4 Ne2+ White resigns

It's mate after 28 Bxe2 Rxc2+ 29 Kb1 Qb4+ 30 Ka1 Qb2.

White Plays g2-g3

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 g3 (Diagram 14)



Diagram 14

The starting position for the g3 variation

This introduces a positional and sophisticated system of development which is, however, considered by most to be quite harmless against the Dragon. White expends an extra tempo to develop his kingside bishop on g2, where it will be blocked by the e4-pawn. When put like this, it is surprising that this line has gained any popularity at all. However, as we shall see below, there are some redeeming features to this method of development.

6...Nc6 7 Nde2

For 7 Bg2 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0, see Game 8.

7...Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0

Strategies

For once in the Dragon, White's play is not motivated by an attack on the black king. Instead, White normally aims for positional pressure on the centre.

The bishop on g2 overprotects the e4-pawn. This allows White's knight on c3 to move and a common idea for White is to play Nc3-d5,

which can prove to be of great annoyance value. If Black captures on d5, then White normally recaptures with the e4-pawn, offering him the chance to utilise the newly formed half-open e-file. If instead Black attacks the knight with ...e7-e6, then this leaves the d6-pawn slightly vulnerable.

Again Black looks to the queenside for counterplay, although he must be careful not to advance his queenside pawns too early as this may allow White to unleash his light-squared bishop with e4-e5. Rather than acquiescing to an exchange, when the white knight reaches d5, Black generally tries to play around it before ejecting it with a timely ...e7-e6 (see Game 9).

Theoretical?

The g3 line of the Dragon is hardly theoretical and is often played by players who are looking to avoid a heavyweight theoretical battle. There are only one or two variations which need to be learnt.

Statistics

I would have said that this is not a particularly popular line, but I did find just over a thousand examples of Diagram 14 in *Mega Database 2002*, with White scoring a surprisingly high 60%. So perhaps g3 is an underestimated move against the Dragon!

At lower levels, however, I would imagine that this line is less popular as most players are lured by the rewards and the complications of the Yugoslav and Levenfish Attacks.

Illustrative Games

Game 8

Adams Kramnik

Wijk aan Zee 1998

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3

White employs an unusual move order, but eventually we reach an Open Sicilian.

3...d6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 g3 g6

What started off as a Classical Sicilian, has now transposed into a Dragon.



NOTE: There are many transpositional possibilities in the Sicilian Defence.

7 Bg2 Nxd4

It's quite unusual for Black to exchange knights so early, but here Black believes that the queen may become vulnerable on d4.

8 Qxd4 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qb4?!

Prophylactic thinking. White removes the queen from d4 before Black

has a chance to take advantage of it. However, it turns out that the queen is just as vulnerable on this square. White should consider either 10 h3 Be6 11 Qd1 or 10 Qd3!?



NOTE: Prophylaxis is the strategic idea of anticipating or preventing an opponent's threat before it exists.

10...a5! 11 Qb3 Be6! (Diagram 15)



Diagram 15

Inviting the queen to grab a hot pawn



Diagram 16

Black misses a chance to complicate

Black offers a pawn sacrifice, tempting the queen deep into enemy territory.

12 Nd5

After 12 Qxb7 Nd7, in return for the pawn, Black is very active and White's queen is vulnerable.

12...a4!

Forcing the issue.

13 Qxb7 Nxd5 14 exd5 Bf5

White is a pawn up, but it's Black who stands better. Both the c2- and b2-pawns are vulnerable and White's queen is not well placed on b7.

15 Bg5 Qb8!

Even the endgame will favour Black.

16 Qxb8 Rfxb8 17 Bxe7 Rxb2 18 a3

Or 18 Bxd6 Rxc2 19 Rad1 Rxa2 (Kramnik) and Black's passed pawn is stronger than White's.

18...Rxc2 19 Rae1 Ra6

Protecting the vital d6-pawn. Now the major weakness in the position is White's a3-pawn.

20 Be4 Bxe4 21 Rxe4 Bb2 22 Rfe1?

22 Re3! limits the damage.

22...Rc1!

Now the a-pawn is lost. Note that 22...Bxa3?? allows 23 Bf6! with an unstoppable mate on e8.

23 Rxc1 Bxc1 24 Bf6 Ra8 25 Rc4 Bxa3 26 Bd4 Bc5!

Black returns the pawn to reach a technically winning endgame.

27 Bxc5 dxc5 28 Rxc5 a3 29 Rc1 a2 White resigns

There is no hope. For example: 30 Ra1 Kf8 31 Kg2 Ke7 32 Kf3 Kd6 33 Kf4 h6 34 Ke4 Ra4+ 35 Kd3 Kxd5 36 Kc3 Ke4 37 Kb3 Ra7 38 Rxa2 Rxa2 39 Kxa2 Kf3 and the black king gobbles up the white pawns.

Game 9

□ Malakhov ■ Svidler

Elista 1997

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nde2 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Rb8

Preparing queenside counterplay with ...b7-b5.

10 a4 a6 11 Nd5

Occupying this square with the knight is very much normal procedure in the g3 lines.

11...b5

11...Nxd5?! 12 exd5! improves the pawn structure in White's favour. The pawn on d5 is a slight thorn in Black's position and the e7-pawn could eventually become exposed down the half-open e-file.

12 axb5 axb5 13 h3

White wants to play Bc1-e3 without the hassle of having to worry about ...Ng4.

13...b4 14 Be3 Nd7!

Black is ready to eject the knight with ...e7-e6.

15 Qc1

Defending the b2-pawn. Note that after 15 Nd4? Black can win a piece in a surprising way: 15...Bxd4 (Black swaps off his pride and joy but...) 16 Bxd4 e6! 17 Ne3 e5 18 Ba7 Rb7 and the bishop on a7 is trapped.



TIP: Do not dismiss strange looking moves – they may be both strange and good!

15...e6! 16 Ndf4 Qc7 17 Ra2 Nf6 18 Nd3 Rd8 19 e4 Bb7 20 b3 (Diagram 16)

20...Nd7

Here Black could have played 20...Na5!, hitting both the pawn on e4 and the one on b3. Malakhov gives the following line: 21 Nd4 Bxe4 22 Bxe4 Nxe4 23 Nb5 Nxb3! 24 Nxc7 Nxc1 25 Rxc1 b3 with a very unclear position.

21 Rd1 Nce5?

Not good. Black sacrifices his b4-pawn but his calculations are flawed.

22 Nxb4 Nc5 23 Nd4! Bxe4 24 Bxe4 Rxb4

24...Nxe4 allows 25 Na6, forking queen and rook.

25 Nb5! Qb6 26 Qa3 Nxc4?

26...Qb8! 27 Qxb4 Nxe4 was the last chance.

27 bxc4 Rxc4 28 Bd3! Black resigns

28...Qxb5 29 Bxc4 Qxc4 30 Bxc5 and White is a rook ahead for an insignificant two pawns.

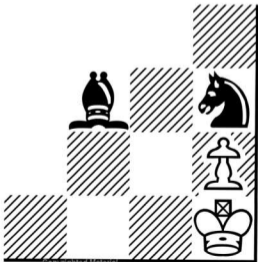
Summary

- 1) The Sicilian Dragon is for brave souls. If White plays the dreaded Yugoslav Attack then both players can look forward to a bloodthirsty battle.
- 2) White players of a more peaceful nature will be inclined to play either the Classical or the g3 variation.
- 3) The Levenfish Attack contains lots of early tricks and black players need to memorise a reliable defence against this.
- 4) The g3 variation is deceptive – it's better than it looks!

Chapter Two

The Najdorf Variation

- The Main Line: 6 Bg5
- The English Attack
- White Plays Be2



starting out: the sicilian

Ideal for those wanting to understand the basics of the Sicilian.

The Sicilian Defence is perhaps the most famous opening in the history of chess, and it is certainly the most popular at every level. From the first move Black claims his share in the centre and constructs an asymmetrical pawn structure. Its greatest attraction is that it allows Black to unbalance the position and play for a win, without having to take any unjustified risks. The many variations of the Sicilian range from the super-solid Scheveningen to the dangerous and ultra-sharp Dragon, so it should be easy to find one that suits your style. In this user-friendly book, Grandmaster John Emms goes back to basics, studying the fundamental principles of the Sicilian Defence in its numerous different guises. Throughout the book there are an abundance of notes, tips, warnings and exercises to help the improving player, while key strategies, ideas and tactics for both sides are clearly illustrated.

- User-friendly design to help readers absorb ideas
- Concentrates on the key principles of the Sicilian
- Ideal for the improving player

John Emms is one of Britain's strongest Grandmasters and is a member of the English national team. He now has many works to his name, including *The Survival Guide to Rook Endings* and *Attacking with 1 e4*, while he is also a co-author of the very popular openings bible *Munn's Chess Openings*.



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